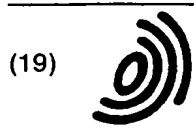


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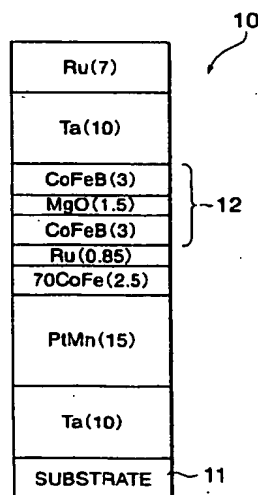
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(54) Magnetoresistance effect device and method of production of the same

(57) A magnetoresistance effect device including a multilayer structure having a pair of ferromagnetic layers and a barrier layer positioned between them, wherein at least one ferromagnetic layer has at least the part contacting the barrier layer made amorphous and the barrier layer is an MgO layer having a single crystal structure.

FIG. 1



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Description

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a magnetoresistance effect device and a method of production of the same, more particularly relates to a magnetoresistance effect device fabricated utilizing a simple sputtering film-formation method and having an extremely high magnetoresistance ratio and a method of production of the same.

2. Description of the Related Art

[0002] In recent years, as nonvolatile memories, magnetic memory devices called "magnetoresistive random access memories (MRAMs)" have come into attention and have started entering the commercial stage. MRAMs are simple in structure, so ultra-high density integration to the gigabit level is easy. In MRAMs, the relative orientation of the magnetic moment is utilized to create the storage action. As the result, the number of possible re-writability is extremely high and the operating speed can be reduced to the nanosecond level.

[0003] FIG. 4 shows the structure of the MRAM. In the MRAM 101, 102 is a memory device, 103 a word line, and 104 a bit line. The large number of memory devices 102 are arranged at intersecting positions of the plurality of word lines 103 and plurality of bit lines 104 and are arranged in a lattice-like positional relationship. Each of the large number of memory devices 102 stores 1 bit of information.

[0004] Each memory device 102 of the MRAM 101, as shown in FIG. 5, is comprised of a magnetoresistance effect device for storing 1 bit of information, that is, a tunneling magnetoresistance (TMR) device 110, and a transistor 106 having a switching function at the intersecting position of the word line 103 and bit line 104. The main element in the memory device 102 is the TMR device 110. The basic structure of the TMR device, as shown in FIG. 6, is a three-layer structure comprised of a bottom ferromagnetic metal electrode (bottom ferromagnetic layer) 107/tunnel barrier layer 108/top ferromagnetic metal electrode (top ferromagnetic layer) 109. The TMR device 110 is therefore comprised of a pair of ferromagnetic layers 107 and 109 and a tunnel barrier layer 108 positioned between them.

[0005] In the TMR device 110, as shown in FIG. 6, the required voltage is applied across the ferromagnetic layers 107 and 109 at the two sides of the tunnel barrier layer 108 to cause the flow of a predetermined current. In that state, an external magnetic field is applied. When the directions of magnetization of the ferromagnetic layers 107 and 109 are parallel and the same (called the "parallel state"), the electrical resistance of the TMR device becomes the minimum ((A) state: resistance value

R_P), while when the directions of magnetization of the ferromagnetic layers are parallel but opposite (called the "anti-parallel state"), the electrical resistance of the TMR device becomes the maximum ((B) state: resistance value R_A). Therefore, the TMR device 110 can take a parallel state and an anti-parallel state induced by an external magnetic field and store information as a change in resistance value.

[0006] To realize a practical gigabit class MRAM using the above TMR device, the difference between the resistance value R_P of the "parallel state" and resistance value R_A of the "anti-parallel state" has to be large. As the indicator, the magnetoresistance ratio (MR ratio) is used. The MR ratio is defined as " $(R_A - R_P) \div R_P$ ".

[0007] To raise the MR ratio, in the past, the electrode materials of the ferromagnetic metal electrodes (ferromagnetic layers) have been optimized, the method of production of the tunnel barrier layers have been modified, etc. For example, Japanese Patent Publication (A) No. 2003-304010 and Japanese Patent Publication (A) No. 2004-63592 propose several optimum examples of use of $Fe_xCo_yB_z$ etc. for the material of the ferromagnetic metal electrode.

[0008] The MR ratio of the TMR device disclosed in Japanese Patent Publication (A) No. 2003-304010 and Japanese Patent Publication (A) No. 2004-63592 is lower than about 70%. Further improvement of the MR ratio is necessary.

[0009] Further, recently, regarding a single crystal TMR thin film using an MgO barrier layer, there has been a report of using molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) and an ultra-high vacuum evaporation system to fabricate an Fe/MgO/Fe single crystal TMR thin film and obtain an MR ratio of 88% (Yuasa, Shinji et al., "High Tunnel Magnetoresistance at Room Temperature in Fully Epitaxial Fe/MgO/Tunnel Junctions due to Coherent Spin-Polarized Tunneling", Nanoelectronic Institute, Japanese Journal of Applied Physics, issued April 2, 2004, Vol. 43, No. 4B, p. L588-L590). This TMR thin film has a completely epitaxial single crystal structure.

[0010] Fabrication of the single crystal TMR thin film used for the single crystal MgO barrier layer described in the above publication requires use of an expensive MgO single crystal substrate. Further, epitaxial growth of an Fe film by an expensive MBE device, formation of an MgO film by ultrahigh vacuum electron beam evaporation and other sophisticated film deposition technology are required. There is the problem that the longer the film deposition time, the less suitable the process for mass production.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] An object of the present invention is to provide a magnetoresistance effect device having a high MR ratio, improving the mass producibility, and improving the practicality and a method of production of the same.

[0012] The magnetoresistance effect device and

method of production of the same according to the present invention are configured as follows to achieve the above object.

[0013] This magnetoresistance effect device includes a multilayer structure comprised of a pair of ferromagnetic layers and a barrier layer positioned between them, wherein at least the part of at least one of the ferromagnetic layers contacting the barrier layer is amorphous, and the barrier layer is an MgO layer having a single crystal structure.

[0014] According to above magnetoresistance effect device, since the barrier layer has a single crystal structure, the flow of current between the ferromagnetic layers can be made straight and the MR ratio can be made an extremely high value.

[0015] In the magnetoresistance effect device, preferably the MgO layer is a single crystal layer formed by the sputtering method. However, an MgO layer with highly oriented fiber-texture structure also yield excellent properties. According to this configuration, the intermediate barrier layer can be produced simply. This is suitable for mass production.

[0016] In the magnetoresistance effect device, preferably the MgO layer is a single crystal layer formed using an MgO target and the sputtering method.

[0017] In the magnetoresistance effect device, preferably the ferromagnetic layers are CoFeB layers.

[0018] The method of production of a magnetoresistance effect device is a method of production of a magnetoresistance effect device including a multilayer structure comprised of a pair of ferromagnetic layers and a barrier layer positioned between them, comprising forming at least one ferromagnetic layer so that at least at least the part contacting the barrier layer is amorphous and forming the barrier layer having a single crystal structure by using the sputtering method. Further, in the method of production of a magnetoresistance effect device, preferably the MgO layer is formed by RF magnetron sputtering using an MgO target.

[0019] According to the present invention, since the tunnel barrier layer forming the intermediate layer of the TMR device or other magnetoresistance effect device is an MgO layer having a single crystal structure, the MR ratio can be made extremely high. When using this as a memory device of an MRAM, a gigabit class ultra-high integrated MRAM can be realized. Further, by forming the a single crystal MgO layer by the sputtering method, it is possible to fabricate a magnetoresistance effect device suitable for mass production and having high practical applicability.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] These and other objects and features of the present invention will become clearer from the following description of the preferred embodiments given with reference to the attached drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a view of the structure of a magnetoresistance effect device (TMR device) according to the present invention,

FIG. 2 is a plan view of a system for fabricating a magnetoresistance effect device (TMR device) according to the present invention,

FIG. 3 is a graph of the pressure dependency of magnetic characteristics of a magnetoresistance effect device (TMR device) according to the present invention,

FIG. 4 is a partial perspective view of the principal structure of an MRAM,

FIG. 5 is a view of the structure of a memory device of an MRAM, and

FIG. 6 is a view for explaining the characteristics of a TMR device.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0021] Below, a preferred embodiment of the present invention will be explained with reference to the attached drawings.

[0022] FIG. 1 shows an example of the multilayer structure of a magnetoresistance effect device according to the present invention, in particular shows the multilayer structure of a TMR device. According to this TMR device 10, a substrate 11 is formed with a multilayer film comprised of for example nine layers forming the TMR device 10. In this nine-layer multilayer film, magnetic films etc. are stacked from the bottommost first layer to the topmost ninth layer with "Ta", "PtMn", "70CoFe", "Ru", "CoFeB", "MgO", "CoFeB", "Ta", and "Ru" in that order. The first layer (Ta: tantalum) is an undercoat layer, while the second layer (PtMn) is an anti-ferromagnetic layer. The layers from the third layer to the fifth layer (70 CoFe, Ru, CoFeB) form fixed magnetization layers. The substantive fixed magnetization layer is the fifth layer ferromagnetic layer comprised of "CoFeB". The sixth layer (MgO: magnesium oxide) is an insulating layer forming a tunnel barrier layer. The seventh layer (CoFeB) is a ferromagnetic layer forming a free magnetization layer. The sixth layer (MgO) forms an intermediate layer between the pair of ferromagnetic layers (CoFeB) arranged at the top and bottom. The eighth layer (Ta: tantalum) and the ninth layer (Ru: ruthenium) form hard mask layers. The fixed magnetization layer (fifth layer "CoFeB"), the tunnel barrier layer (sixth layer "MgO"), and free magnetization layer (seventh layer "CoFeB") form the TMR device part 12 in the strict sense as a basic structure. The fixed magnetization layer fifth layer "CoFeB" and the free magnetization layer seventh layer "CoFeB" are known as amorphous ferromagnetic bodies in the as-deposited state. The tunnel barrier layer constituted by the MgO layer is formed so as to have a a single crystal structure across the thickness direction.

[0023] Note that, in FIG. 1, the figures in parentheses at the layers indicate the thicknesses of the layers in units of "nm (nanometers)". The thicknesses are examples.

The invention is not limited to them.

[0024] Next, referring to FIG. 2, a system and method for producing a TMR device 10 having the above multilayer structure will be explained. FIG. 2 is a schematic plan view of a system for producing a TMR device 10. This system can produce a multilayer film including a plurality of magnetic fields and is a sputtering film-forming system for mass production.

[0025] The magnetic multilayer film fabrication system 20 shown in FIG. 2 is a cluster type system provided with a plurality of film-forming chambers using the sputtering method. In this system 20, a transport chamber 22 provided with not shown robot loaders at the center position. The transport chamber 22 of the magnetic multilayer film fabrication system 20 is provided with two load/unload chambers 25 and 26 which load/unload substrates (silicon substrates) 11. These load/unload chambers 25 and 26 are used alternately to enable fabrication of a multilayer film with a good productivity.

[0026] In this magnetic multilayer film fabrication system 20, the transport chamber 22 is surrounded with, for example, three film-forming chambers 27A, 27B, and 27C and one etching chamber 28. In the etching chamber 28, the required surface of a TMR device 10 is etched. At the interface with each chamber, a gate valve 30 separating the two chambers and able to open/close the passage between them is provided. Note that each chamber is also provided with a not shown evacuation mechanism, gas introduction mechanism, power supply mechanism, etc.

[0027] The film-forming chambers 27A, 27B, and 27C of the magnetic multilayer film fabrication system 20 use the sputtering method to deposit the above-mentioned magnetic films on the substrate 11 successively from the bottom. For example, the ceilings of the film-forming chambers 27A, 27B, and 27C are provided with four or five targets (31, 32, 33, 34, 35), (41, 42, 43, 44, 45), and (51, 52, 53, 54) arranged on suitable circumferences. Substrate holders positioned coaxially with the circumferences carry substrates on them.

[0028] In the above explanation, for example, the target 31 is made of "Ta", while the target 33 is made of "CoFeB". Further, the target 41 is made of "PtMn", the target 42 is made of "CoFe", and the target 43 is made of "Ru". Further, the target 51 is made of "MgO".

[0029] The above plurality of targets are provided suitably inclined so as to suitably face the substrate so as to efficiently deposit magnetic films of suitable formulations, but they may also be provided in states parallel to the substrate surface. Further, they are arranged to enable the plurality of targets and the substrate to relatively rotate. In the system 20 having this configuration, the film-forming chambers 27A, 27B, and 27C are utilized to successively form films of the magnetic multilayer film shown in FIG. 1 on the substrate 11 by the sputtering method.

[0030] The film-forming conditions of the TMR device part 12 forming the portion of the main elements of the

present invention will be explained. The fixed magnetization layer (fifth layer "CoFeB") is formed using a CoFeB 60/20/20 at% target at an Ar pressure of 0.03 Pa, a magnetron DC sputtering, and a sputtering rate of 0.64 Å/sec. Next, the tunnel barrier layer (sixth layer "MgO") is formed using a MgO 50/50 at% target, a sputter gas of Ar, and a pressure changed in the range of 0.01 to 0.4 Pa. Magnetron RF sputtering is used to form the film at a sputtering rate of 0.14 Å/sec. Next, the free magnetization layer (seventh layer "CoFeB") is formed under the same film-forming conditions as the fixed magnetization layer (fifth layer "CoFeB").

[0031] In this embodiment, the film-forming speed of the MgO film was 0.14 Å/sec, but the film may also be formed at a speed in the range of 0.01 to 1.0 Å/sec.

[0032] The TMR device 10 finished being formed with films by sputtering in the film-forming chambers 27A, 27B, and 27C is annealed in a heat treatment oven. At this time, the annealing temperature is for example about 300°C. The annealing is performed in a magnetic field of for example 8 kOe (632 kA/m) for example for 4 hours. Due to this, the PtMn of the second layer of the TMR device 10 is given the required magnetization alignment.

[0033] FIG. 3 shows the results of measurement of the magnetic characteristics of MgO. A high MR ratio is obtained over the entire measured range. In particular, in the region of a pressure of 0.05 Pa to 0.2 Pa, a high MR ratio was obtained. In the region of a pressure of 0.05 Pa or more, the pressure on the substrate increases and the ion impact falls believed resulting in a reduction in film defects. With a pressure of 0.05 Pa or more, the MR ratio increases and the tunnel resistance value (R_A) increases. This is believed to be due to formation of a good single crystal film and as a result the leakage current of the film is decreased. On the other hand, in the region of 0.05 Pa or less, the tunnel resistance value (R_A) falls and the MR ratio also falls. This is believed to be because the ion impact increases - resulting in an increase in defects of the MgO film. A cross-section of a sample was observed by a transmission electron microscope (TEM). As a result, it was observed that, over the entire range of the measured pressure, the MgO film had a single crystal structure over the entire layer from the bottom interface to the top interface and that the (001) plane of the MgO single crystal was oriented parallel to the interfaces. Further, it was observed that the CoFeB layer was formed in an amorphous state prior to annealing.

[0034] This sample was formed by sandwiching the two sides of the MgO layer with ferromagnetic layers of amorphous CoFeB. But even if only one of the ferromagnetic layers was amorphous CoFeB, similar results are observed. Preferably, during deposition of MgO layer the bottom ferromagnetic layer was amorphous. Although the CoFeB ferromagnetic layers were initially amorphous prior to annealing, the CoFeB ferromagnetic layers became crystallized or partly crystallized when subjected to annealing at temperature higher than 300°C for a few hours. In this case, the MgO layer, sandwiched with crys-

tallized CoFeB ferromagnetic layers, showed a single crystal with the (001) crystal plane of MgO barrier layer lies parallel to the ferromagnetic layer surface. Compared with the samples annealed at 300°C, the samples annealed at higher temperature did not show degradation of magnetic and magnetoresistance properties (MR ratio, R_A etc.).

[0035] On the other hand, when forming CoFe having a polycrystalline structure as the ferromagnetic layer at the two sides of the MgO layer, a large number of dislocations are seen in the MgO layer, a good single crystal film cannot be obtained, and the magnetoresistance characteristics are low.

[0036] At this time, as explained above, an MgO target 51 was used as the target. Preferably, the RF (high frequency) magnetron sputtering method was used. Note that the reactive sputtering method may also be used to sputter the Mg target by a mixed gas of Ar and O₂ and form an MgO film.

[0037] Note that above, the MgO layer is a single crystal throughout the layer and has a single crystal structure with an (001) plane oriented parallel to the interfaces. Further, the pair of ferromagnetic layers forming the TMR device part 12 may also be, instead of the CoFeB having an amorphous state, CoFeTaZr, CoTaZr, CoFeNbZr, CoFeZr, FeTaC, FeTaN, FeC, or other ferromagnetic layers having an amorphous state.

[0038] The configurations, shapes, sizes (thicknesses), and layouts explained in the above embodiments are only shown schematically to an extent enabling the present invention to be understood and worked. Further, the numerical values and compositions (materials) are only shown for illustration. Therefore, the present invention is not limited to the explained embodiments and can be changed in various ways within the scope of the technical idea shown in the claims.

[0039] The present invention contains subject matter related to Japanese Patent Application No. 2004-259280 filed on filed in the Japan Patent Office on September 7, 2004, the entire contents of which being incorporated herein by reference.

Claims

1. A magnetoresistance effect device including a multilayer structure comprised of a pair of ferromagnetic layers and a barrier layer positioned between them, wherein
at least the part of at least one of said ferromagnetic layers contacting said barrier layer is amorphous, and
said barrier layer is an MgO layer having a single crystal structure.
2. A magnetoresistance effect device as set forth in claim 1, wherein said MgO layer is a single crystal layer formed by the sputtering method.
3. A magnetoresistance effect device as set forth in claim 2, wherein said MgO layer is a single crystal layer formed using an MgO target and the sputtering method.
4. A magnetoresistance effect device as set forth in claim 1, wherein said ferromagnetic layers are CoFeB layers.
5. A method of production of a magnetoresistance effect device including a multilayer structure comprised of a pair of ferromagnetic layers and a barrier layer positioned between them, comprising:
forming at least one ferromagnetic layer so that at least the part contacting the barrier layer is amorphous and forming said barrier layer having a single crystal structure by using the sputtering method.
6. A method of production of a magnetoresistance effect device as set forth in claim 5, further comprising forming said MgO layer by the sputtering method using an MgO target.

FIG. 1

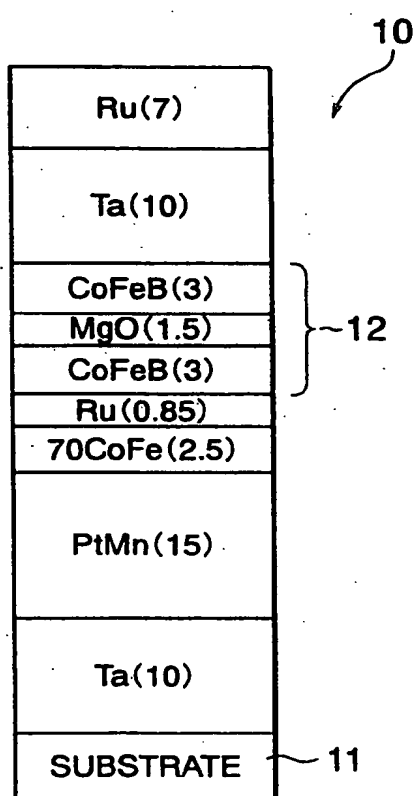


FIG. 2

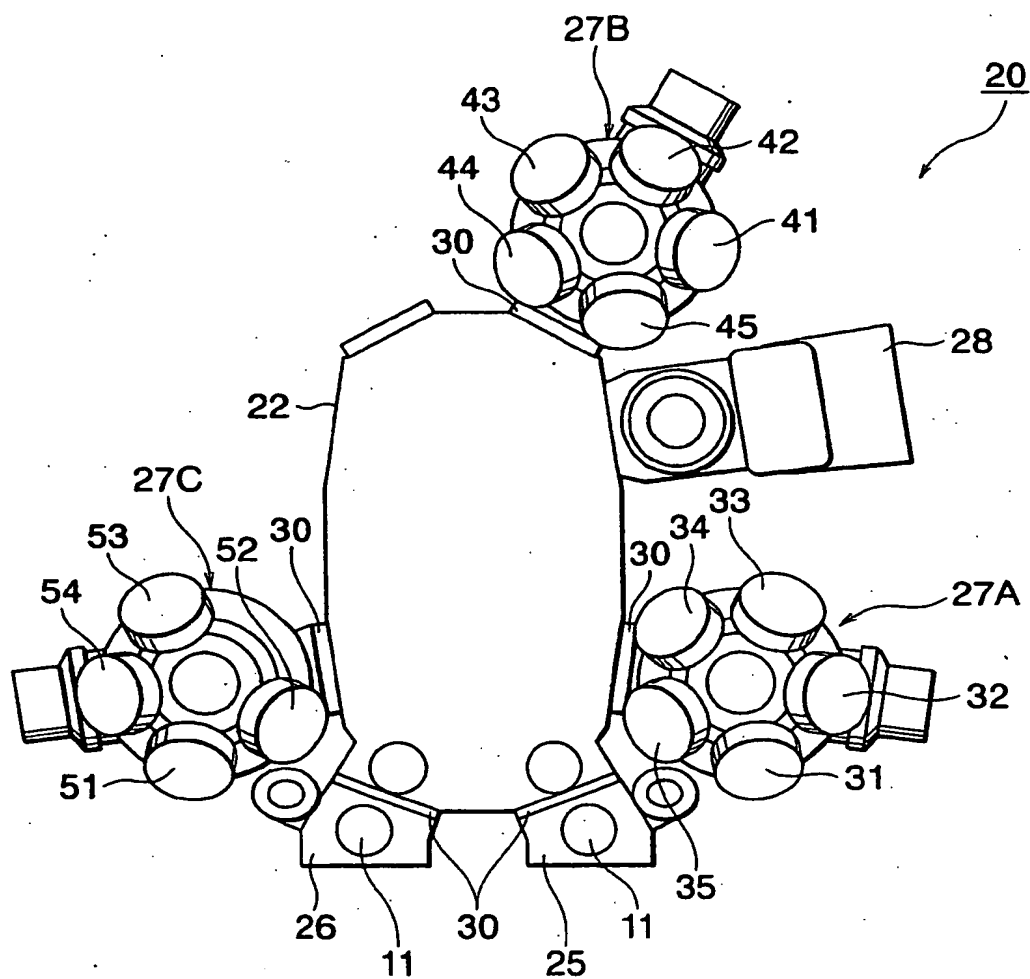


FIG. 3

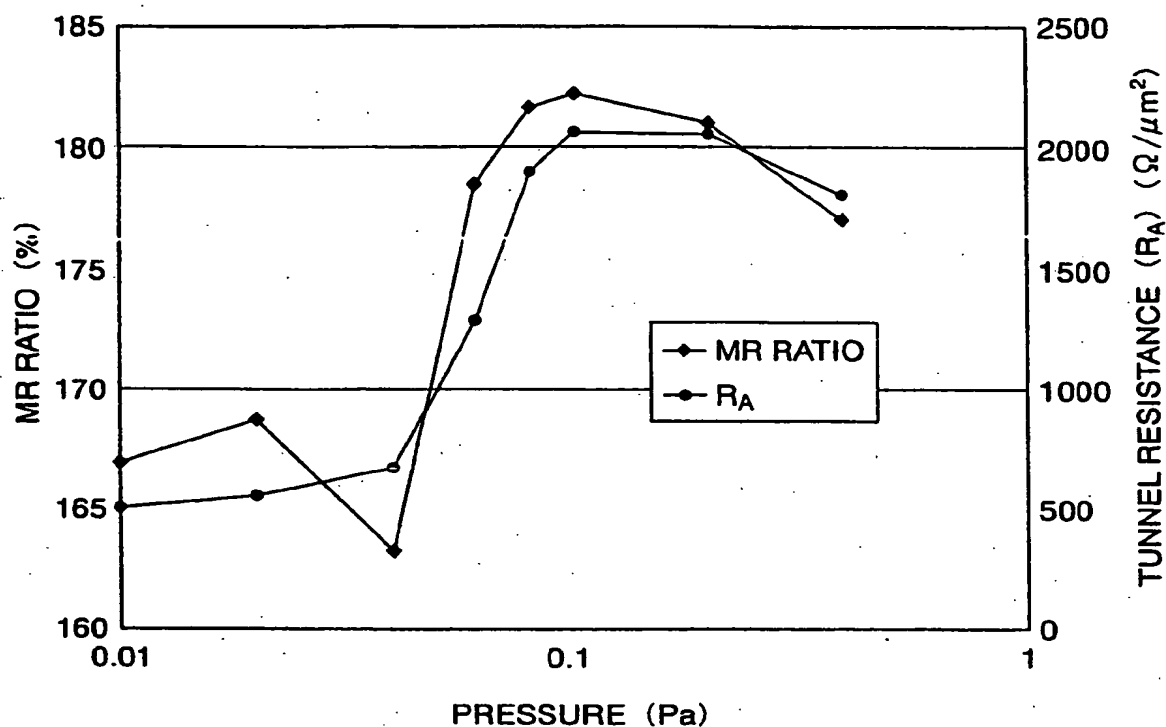


FIG. 4 RELATED ART

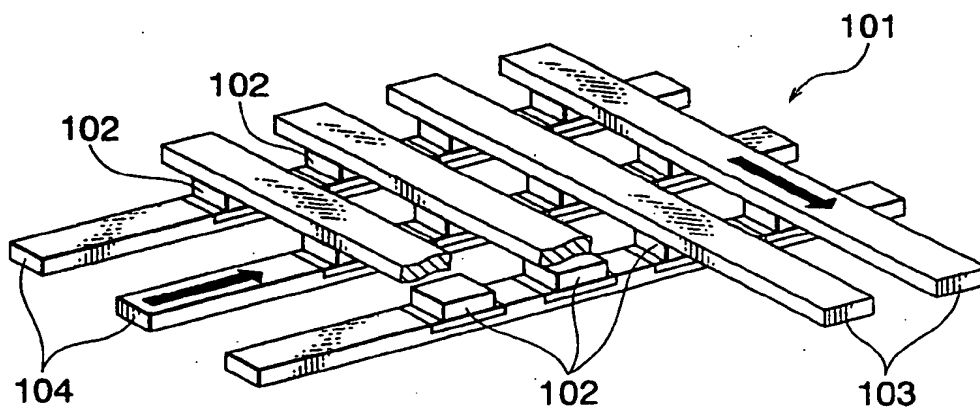


FIG. 5 RELATED ART

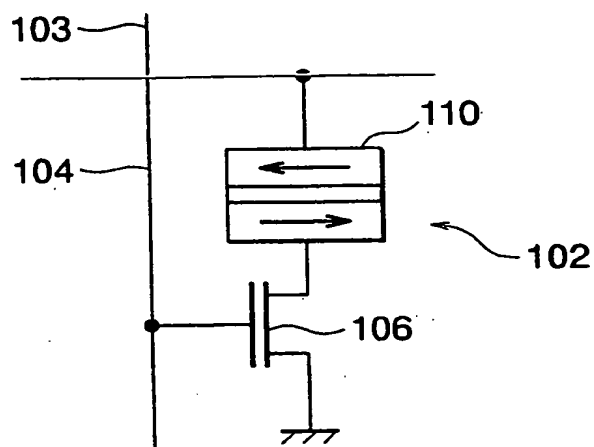


FIG. 6 RELATED ART

